



REPRECINCTING

fair representation in local elections

Establishing Precinct Boundaries Frequently Asked Questions

Every ten years all communities in the Commonwealth are required to review population numbers from the Federal Census and submit a new precinct map for approval by the State. The Select Board begins by reviewing a draft of new boundary lines created by the Secretary of State and then proposes adjustments, if necessary. The Select Board votes to approve the final map and precinct descriptions and submits the final map by October 30, 2021. The draft maps prepared by the State require local input as the State's mapping algorithm focuses only on population numbers, and does not account for neighborhood make up. There is a link to Reprecincting information and the initial draft maps on the [Elections Page](#).

What is Arlington required to do by law?

The Town must adjust the boundaries of precinct boundaries based on data from the 2020 Census. Massachusetts State law provides the following guidelines for drawing precinct boundaries:

- Each precinct may have a maximum of 4,000 residents
- The total population in each precinct may not vary more than +/- 5% from the average precinct population
- Precincts must be geographically compact
- Municipalities should also consider race, income and other variables when adjusting precinct boundaries
- Precinct boundaries may not divide the underlying Census Blocks

Since Town Meeting Members are elected representatives of the precincts in which they live, Massachusetts State law provides additional guidelines regarding the number of Town Meeting Members:

- Towns must have as close to 240 Town Meeting Members as possible
- The number of Town Meeting Members (TMMs) in each precinct must be divisible by 3 (e.g., 12, 15, 18)

Who is the Reprecincting Working Group?

Given the many resolutions passed by Town Meeting to celebrate past and present diversity in Arlington, as well as the Town's ongoing initiatives to advance racial equity efforts, the Town has established a Reprecincting Working Group to move beyond basic population numbers and look closely at how precinct boundaries are drawn. The Reprecincting Working Group is comprised of the following Town staff:

- Juliana Brazile, Town Clerk
- Jillian Harvey, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Adam Kurowski, Director of GIS / Systems Analyst
- Kelly Lynema, Senior Planner, Department of Planning and Community Development

The Reprecincting Working Group has sought to bring more equity to the process, considering factors such as race, ethnicity, age, income, homeownership, and equitable elections of Town Meeting Members when drafting proposed boundaries. Additionally, the Elections Modernization Committee and the Arlington League of Women Voters have advised on the reprecincting process, and are assisting in outreach and engagement to residents.

Why is changing the number of precincts in Arlington being considered, and how would this impact each precinct?

The Town Clerk proposes that the Town reduce the number of precincts from 21 to 16 and maintain eight polling locations. Having fewer precincts will enable the Town to respond more nimbly in adapting procedures in response to changes in election laws. Many voters will retain their same polling location. Furthermore, with each polling location hosting two precincts, every precinct will have a more uniform voting experience.

If the number of precincts is reduced to 16, the:

- Average population of each precinct would increase from about 2200 to 2900;
- Number of Town Meeting Members (TMMs) would decrease from 252 to 240; and
- Precincts would elect five Town Meeting Members each year for three-year terms.

While more residents would be assigned to a given polling location, trends from recent elections indicate that residents are increasingly relying on early voting, absentee voting, and voting by mail. Staffing fewer precincts on Election Day makes it easier to add election workers to staff early voting or process mailed ballots in the weeks leading up to an election.

What happens if Arlington continues to have 21 Precincts?

Due to the extent of the population change, even if the number of precincts is not reduced, the boundaries of most precincts will change, as they have in the past (see chart on pg 4). Or, the data will highlight a need to adjust certain boundaries to respect demographic change in some precincts, which will cause other boundaries to change. When a precinct boundary changes, all Town Meeting Members from that precinct must be re-elected. Any resident of voting age in the newly-drawn precinct who wishes to run may do so, and voters will elect up to 12 candidates. The top four candidates get three-year seats, the next four get two-year seats and the final four get one-year seats.

What kind of feedback are you seeking from residents?

The Town is committed to a participatory process in evaluating the four draft precinct maps. As neighborhood experts who best understand their adjacent community, all residents are invited to:

1) Identify neighborhoods or boundaries that need further study regarding the impact of dividing or combining households or the possibility of future growth. Feedback on the map is VITAL and applies whether we have 16 or 21 precincts.

- Circle neighborhoods on a map that should be reviewed carefully

- Submit written comments on demographic issues and concerns

2) Feedback on changing the number of precincts and the impacts on voters and voting. There are pros and cons to various details that the community is invited to explore.

Where can I find the maps we have been asked to provide feedback on?

Below are links to maps that were provided by the Secretary of State, based exclusively on population estimates, as well as two maps developed by the Reprecincting Working Group. The Reprecincting Working Group evaluated demographic information like race, ethnicity, age, homeownership, and income, in addition to population estimates, to inform how precinct boundaries can be more equitably drawn, as the Town's ultimate goal in this process is to ensure fair representation in local elections.

- [State Draft – 21 Precincts](#)
- [State Draft – 16 Precincts](#)
- [Town Draft – 21 Precincts](#)
- [Town Draft – 16 Precincts](#)

How can I share feedback on the reprecincting process or any of the four draft precinct maps?

Residents may submit feedback using any of the methods listed below.

Online: [Google Form](#)
 Email: TownClerk@town.arlington.ma.us
 Mail: Town Clerk, 730 Massachusetts Ave, Arlington, MA 02476
 Drop Box: Town Hall drop boxes are located in front of the building or in the parking lot off Academy St.

Information about public forums and new versions of precinct maps will be posted on the Elections Page of the Town Website, announced via Town Notice emails and on the Town's social media accounts.

The Reprecincting Working Group will aggregate all community feedback into revised precinct map alternatives. The alternative maps and all public comments will be shared with the Select Board to inform their final decision.

Will my polling location change?

This is possible with or without a change in the number of precincts. While the Town endeavors to maintain an equitable distribution of polling locations, increasing the overall number of polling locations increases the cost of each election. The Town is committed to working with local service providers like the Council on Aging, Veterans' Affairs, and the League of Women Voters of Arlington to provide transportation for residents for whom getting to their polling location is a barrier.

How would reducing the number of precincts impact Town Meeting?

The number of Town Meeting Members (TMMs) per precinct would change, as would the geographic area of each precinct.

- Each voter gains three more TMMs from their precinct (15 instead of 12)

- The Town loses a total of 12 TMMs overall (252 reduces to 240)
- The area of each precinct increases which expands the pool of Town Meeting Member candidates for any given precinct
- On average, each Town Meeting Member would represent an additional 700 residents

What precincts were adjusted based on 2000 and 2010 Census information?

The gray boxes indicate precincts affected the last two times Arlington redrew the boundaries.

2002 - 13 of 21 precincts had boundary changes							2012 - 15 of 21 precincts had boundary changes						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21

How many precincts do other Towns in Massachusetts have?

Data on the number of precincts in other communities

Population	Town	Minimum No. Precincts	Actual No. Precincts	Residents/ Precinct
59000	Brookline	15	16	3688
57000	Medford	15	16	3563
56500	Plymouth	15	15	3767
43700	Arlington	11	21	2205
40000	Billerica	11	11	3636
36200	Natick	10	10	3620
33000	Andover	9	9	3667
32900	Watertown	9	12	2742
31300	N Andover	8	8	3913
31000	Lexington	8	9	3444
29500	Needham	8	10	2950
27500	Melrose	7	14	1964
27200	Milton	7	10	2720
25200	Belmont	7	8	3150
25200	Reading	7	8	3150
21900	Winchester	6	8	2738
21600	Stoneham	6	7	3086

The highlighted communities are those we most often compare ourselves to (a.k.a. “The Town Manager’s 12”). Those 12 communities, not including Arlington, average 3,237 residents per precinct.

Below are questions we've received and answers or clarifications

Q. Why did you draw a line down my street so my neighbor across the street is in a different precinct?

A. The standards for precinct boundaries specify the center line of streets should be used because that is how census blocks were established. It's how the lines work now, although you may not know if you haven't lived on a boundary street before.

Q. Why is the line between two precincts sometimes jagged?

A. The census blocks themselves sometimes have odd shapes, but it may also be that to balance the numbers in a precinct we need one or two blocks moved into the next precinct and might review the demographic information of the two possible blocks to choose the one that matches the precinct best. This does not violate the compactness standard.

The Secretary of State's staff met with Reprecincting Working Groups over the summer to help explain the details to each community. [You can review the presentation here.](#)